

Hiring and keeping great workers is tough work

The tight labor pool for exceptional people has organizations refocused on a lost art — finding and retaining great employees.

From compensation and flexible work schedules to allowing pets in the workplace, organizations are trying just about everything to figure out ways of attracting and then keeping good people. There is no question that the “war for talent” among local organizations, combined with a skills shortage, has created employment market conditions not seen for some time.

The scary part is that some organizations, desperate for workers, are sacrificing employee performance standards and short-cutting fundamental recruiting and selection practices. One CEO recently told me he would hire any “warm body” he could find, just to keep his machines running. To further complicate his staffing problem, turnover in his company is approaching 50 percent. Yikes!

Someone once said that your best defense is a great offense. This is an accurate statement when you look at



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growing an organization, especially in times like these.

People are attracted to, and stay with organizations,

for a variety of reasons. The challenge today is developing a work environment that separates your organization from the pack. A commonly used term today is to become an “employer of choice.” Like selling time in a bottle, this magical mix of human resources and workplace practices is testing even the best of today’s organizations.

One day we will look back at this era and see that some wonderful things happened to organizations as a result of the skilled labor shortage.

Organizations have become more aggressive and creative with their compensation, benefits and work/family balance programs. In addition, they have refined their training, recruitment and selection techniques and have rediscovered the Human

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Resources department.

The beneficiary of these changes has been the employee. Progressive-thinking organizations are really becoming skilled at attracting the various generations and even keeping them for a few years.

In addition, we are finding out that the truly great performers want to work with other great performers.

In the past, you could pretty much rely on a bell-shaped curve of performance evaluation results in just about any organization. Results would show a small group of “under-performers,” a larger group of “satisfactory” or “average performers” and of course a few “superior” performers. Some merit-based compensation systems were even based off

this bell-shaped curve so that the budgeted base salary increases could be equitably dispersed among the troops.

Those were the good old days.

Today, if you really want to become an “employer of choice,” you had better develop a reputation for attracting and keeping great performers.

Easier said than done, but not impossible. Great workplaces have developed extraordinary programs over the years that focus on creating work environments supporting individual and team successes. People feel recognized, rewarded and appreciated in these organizations. They also have latitude to grow, exceptional leaders are expected to perform at very high levels.

No bell-shaped curves here. These organizations are attracting and retaining some of the best workers in town.

The alternative is not a rosy picture.

Organizations that are not stepping up to the plate and making concerted efforts toward developing superior work environments (with all the extras) will continue to lose their competitive position in the marketplace. Perhaps they will continue to survive, but traditional practices for attracting, retaining and rewarding employees will likely produce a traditional bell-shaped curve of performers.

Chances are, great performers will leave for greener pastures, while the mediocre performers remain. This dynamic results in the worst kind of turnover an organization can experience — allowing poor and mediocre performers an opportunity to “quit and stay.”

In these organizations, “warm bodies” are the upgrade.